

Social Cohesion and Trust Building



Strengthening social cohesion is a complex post-conflict societal challenge requiring the engagement of multiple stakeholders at multiple levels. It focuses on relations and shared values that foster unity, solidarity, and a sense of community. (Re)building trust within and between communities and between citizens and institutions is an essential aspect of this work. Bridging divisions, reducing fear, restoring mutual trust and understanding will ultimately help generate more secure and stable Bosnia and Herzegovina; more common perspectives and priorities while increasing co-operation within and between communities. Trust also underpins effective democratic governance processes by strengthening citizen participation, institutional responsiveness, and accountability, serving both as a key driver and as a lasting outcome of social cohesion efforts.

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mission) has been actively engaged in strengthening social cohesion in the country since 2013, particularly at the local level. Early efforts centred on supporting informal community networks of civil society organizations (CSOs) and activists that addressed, on-going post-war hate- and bias-related incidents through local initiatives promoting unity and co-operation. While these networks played an important

role in responding to incidents and fostering constructive dialogue, building on lessons learned, the Mission recently began focusing on strengthening existing, well-established local CSOs and partners that contributed to the establishment of institutional mechanisms that better connect citizens and strengthen community cohesion. The Mission also encourages the active participation of civil society in the design and implementation of other

local policies; in securing the commitment of public officials to sustained and inclusive engagement with civil society on strategic and day to day community challenges; in strengthening co-operation and co-ordination among local stakeholders to ensure the sustainability of intra- and inter-community initiatives. Other important aspects of the Mission's social cohesion and trust-building work include: Supporting inclusive dialogue platforms that bring together civil society, local authorities, and the broader community including youth, women, and minority groups -- to identify common priorities and challenges and to co-create solutions; seeking ways to promote durable and genuine reconciliation; enhancing the capacities of civil society and institutions to jointly design, implement, and monitor

initiatives that strengthen community resilience, participatory governance and trust in institutions.

Furthermore, the Mission's work on trust-building and reconciliation focuses on identifying shared inter- and intra-community interests across various regions of the country and engaging local stakeholders in the design of initiatives and programmes that reinforce trust – and in the process – greater stability and security through joint action and collaboration. To complement these efforts, the Mission established several ExB projects dedicated to advancing trust-building programming—an objective embedded in the Mission's longstanding commitment to promoting stability and reconciliation. Initially, these activities concentrated on cross-entity locations.

However, as the programming evolved, it became evident that mixed communities throughout the country offered comparable opportunities. Building on grassroots initiatives, the Mission's longer-term goals are to institutionalize mechanisms and frameworks for trust-building and reconciliation within governance systems and policy-making processes, to facilitate community-led change in selected regions demonstrating potential to overcome entrenched divisions, and to continue identifying and building on opportunities that foster constructive inter- and intra-community engagement, stability and security.

Since 2014 the Mission worked to help key stakeholders implement locally designed Community Cohesion Action Plans (CCAPs). The CCAPs provide guidance for addressing key challenges and promoting shared values. While developed following a common framework, the plans are informed by locally specific needs and priorities identified through research conducted by local civil society organizations. The CCAPs are then developed by local authorities in consultations with local CSOs and with the support of the Mission. The plans clearly outline actions to be taken in order to strengthen trust and cohesion within communities while aiming to prevent the recurrence of hate- and bias-motivated incidents.

For more information,
scan the QR code.



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